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**MEDIA RELEASE: Short sentences and interrupted lives: Commission calls for 'paradigm shift' in the way we respond to criminalised women**

A new report released today has highlighted serious concerns about women in prison, and is calling for a major rethink of how we think about and respond to criminalised women.

The Women In Prison 2019 report by the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland is a followup to a similar report released in 2006 – and shows the situation is not improving for female prisoners.

There are some serious issues which need addressing in relation to women in prison in Queensland, says Deputy Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, Neroli Holmes.

The continued over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women should be a priority for action, given they now constitute over a third of the female prisoner population, says Holmes.

We need, as a priority, a coherent plan to address the high rates of imprisonment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Queensland.

The female prison population grew by 59% between 2006 and 2016, the report found, while the percentage of female prisoners who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander grew from 26% to 35%.

The increasing female prison population has created resourcing problems, and until recently resulted in severe overcrowding in the Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre. Overcrowding issues have had a temporary reprieve with the opening of the Southern Queensland Correctional Centre but if the prisoner population continues to grow at current rates, these problems will arise again.

Many women in prison have experienced trauma and are not receiving the support they need, either in prison or after they leave, to help them successfully manage life outside jail, argues Holmes.

Some will have nowhere to go after prison, and end up reoffending or breaking their parole conditions and getting sent back to prison, where they have limited access to supports like counselling or substance abuse programs.

Half the women in prison are there for less than 3 months. The disruption caused to their dependent children can be very harmful, and there needs to be a focus on other ways of dealing with these women's offending that are less costly to our community and less disruptive to their families.

Holmes argues that prison can and should be a place for rehabilitation for longer term prisoners, not simply the warehousing of people society prefers to forget about.

Our current model is broken. We need a paradigm shift in the way we think about and respond to criminalised women.

The report finds the housing shortage across the state is also impacting heavily on women trying to reintegrate into society.

It calls for action across a wide range of measures, including justice reinvestment and more diversionary programs to provide alternatives to jail for women who would serve short sentences. A draft Productivity Commission report into imprisonment and recidivism released last month made similar recommendations.

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